

APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

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**METHOD FOR INTRODUCING STRUCTURES WHICH HAVE DIFFERENT
DIMENSIONS INTO A SUBSTRATE**

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METHOD FOR INTRODUCING STRUCTURES WHICH HAVE DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS INTO A SUBSTRATE

BACKGROUND

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The invention relates to a process for patterning a substrate, and more particularly for introducing structures which have different dimensions, in particular with regard to the depth, into a substrate

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[0002] Structures with different dimensions, in particular with regard to the depth in a substrate, are very often used in Very Large Scale Integration (VLSI) technology, such as in the context of multilayer metallization.

[0003] Two metal or interconnect levels which lie above one another and are separated from one another by an electrically insulating interlayer are electrically connected to one another by contact structures running perpendicular to the levels. The contact structures, which are also referred to as contact holes, are introduced into the insulating interlayer, and are generally filled with a metal and extend from an upper interconnect level to the next interconnect level down.

[0004] A process for the structuring of an interconnect level with contact holes which is currently in widespread use is the dual damascene process, in which interconnects and contact holes are introduced into the insulating interlayer as an inlay. In a single damascene process, structures of a certain depth, i.e. interconnect or contact holes, are etched into a substrate, and the etched recesses in the substrate are filled with a material, e.g., metal, in the case of interconnects. Excess material on the surface of the substrate is removed by etching back or a Chemical Mechanical Polishing (CMP)

step. The dual damascene process makes it possible for structures with two different depths to be structured in the substrate, for example contact holes and interconnects, as an inlay in the manner described. A dual damascene process requires two lithography levels, each having a mask which is to be imaged onto the substrate and includes the arrangement of the structures, one mask predetermining the arrangement of the shallower structure, e.g., interconnects, and the other mask predetermining the arrangement of the deeper structure, e.g., contact holes.

[0005] The structuring of the substrate for a dual damascene process for the introduction of interconnects and contact holes into the substrate is roughly outlined in Figures 1A-F. Substrate 4 is provided with a photosensitive layer 1 (Fig. 1A), onto which a mask 14 (FIG 1B), which includes an interconnect arrangement, is then imaged by means of a lithography step. After patterning of photosensitive layer 1, during which step photosensitive layer 1 is partially opened and substrate 4 becomes visible in the openings 10 (Fig. 1C), the trenches 11 for the interconnects are etched into substrate 4 down to a predetermined depth, as depicted in Figure 1D. Photosensitive layer 1 is removed and replaced with a new photosensitive layer 1', illustrated in Figure 1E. Mask 15, which includes a contact hole arrangement, is imaged onto the new photosensitive layer 1' in a second lithography step (Figure 1F). After photosensitive layer 1' has been patterned (Fig. 1G), deep trenches for the contact holes 12 are etched into substrate 4 (Fig. 1H). Finally, all the structures in the substrate 4 are filled with metal, and excess metal on the surface of the substrate 4 is removed (not shown).

[0006] The processing order can also be reversed, i.e. structuring of the contact holes can be performed first, followed by structuring of the interconnects. In any event, the introduction of structures with two different depths requires two lithography levels which have to be precisely matched to one another. On the one hand, the two mask layouts have to fit one another, and on the other hand they have to be highly accurately imaged onto one another, with even the slightest misalignment in the two layouts making the entire structuring unusable. When the second mask plane is being aligned with respect to the first, the coverage accuracy of the exposure unit constitutes an obstacle, i.e. the quality of alignment of the two mask levels with respect to one another is limited. The lack of error tolerance with regard to the relative alignment of the two levels leads to a reduction in production yield, which in turn increases the costs of VLSI products.

[0007] It will therefore be appreciated that a need exists to develop a better process for introducing a plurality of structures which include structures of different depth into a substrate.

SUMMARY

[0008] In an embodiment of the present invention, a process for introducing structures which have a different depth into a substrate which only requires one lithography level is employed. A further embodiment of the invention provides a mask for carrying out the single lithography level process.

[0009] An exemplary embodiment of the present invention includes a layer that stores the information relating to a depth of structures in a substrate being applied to the substrate. After the layer has been partially opened up in a first etching step, the

deeper structures are introduced into the substrate. Information concerning the shallower structures remains stored in the layer as trenches, which have not yet been opened up. In this way, it is possible for structures that have a different depth in the substrate to be introduced into the substrate with just one lithography level, just one mask, which includes the arrangement of the structures, and just one etching process in a single etching chamber.

[0010] The advantages of the process according to the invention are clear: instead of two masks, just one mask, which includes the arrangement of deeper and shallower structures, is required. There is no need to align two different mask layouts to one another, as the features are automatically self-aligned to each other within a single mask. Moreover, an error source resulting from a misalignment of the two masks, which leads to a reduced yield, is avoided. Since alignment, exposure, and etching of the second lithography plane are no longer required, production throughput can be increased, which directly reduces the costs.

[0011] An alternative to the etching process that produces inclined sidewalls is an etching process whose etching rate is dependent on the ratio of depth to width, i.e. on the aspect ratio of the structure to be etched. In a process of this type, the depth of wide structures is etched more quickly than that of less wide structures. A partial opening (partial exposure of the layer below) up of the second layer is achieved by a suitable selection of the etching time.

[0012] In the text which follows, the process according to the invention is explained in more detail with reference to the Figures.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- [0013] Figures 1A-1H illustrate a diagrammatic sequence of the process steps according to the prior art for introduction of structures of different depths into a substrate.
- [0014] Figures 2A-2K illustrate a diagrammatic sequence of the process steps for introduction of structures of different depth into a substrate, according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.
- [0015] Figure 3A illustrates a plan view of structures formed in a second layer according to an embodiment of the present invention.
- [0016] Figures 3B and 3C illustrate cross-sectional views of the structure depicted in Figure 3A.
- [0017] Figure 4 illustrates a plan view of an interconnect with contact holes according to an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- [0018] The following list of symbols is used consistently throughout the text and drawings.

List of reference symbols

1	Photosensitive layer
1'	New photosensitive layer
1''	Further photosensitive layer
2	First layer
3	Second layer
4	Substrate
5	Small opening
6	Inclined sidewalls
7	Large opening
8	Shallow structure
9	Deep structure
10	Opening

- 11 Interconnect
- 12 Contact hole
- 13 Mask
- 14 Mask for interconnect structuring
- 15 Mask for contact hole structuring

[0019] The present invention relates to a process for employing a single mask to produce a set of deep and a set of shallow structures that are aligned with respect to one another within a substrate. After a layer has been partially opened up in a first etching step, the deeper structures are introduced into the substrate. To enable the layer, which stores information relating to the depth of the structures, to be only partially opened up for the deeper structures, the first etching step uses an etching process which produces inclined sidewalls. This process has the advantage that a slope angle α between the inclined sidewalls and a horizontal can be controlled as an additional process parameter by means of adjustable etching process parameters.

[0020] In an exemplary embodiment, mask features that correspond to deep structures to be produced in the substrate have larger dimensions than features which are used to produce shallower features in substrate. A photosensitive layer is exposed using the mask and developed using conventional lithography processing, resulting in a set of small and large openings (or features), being formed in the photosensitive layer 1.

[0021] Figures 2A-K outline the significant process steps involved in a process according an embodiment of the present invention, in which the substrate 4 is covered with a stack comprising at least two layers of different materials, and a photosensitive layer 1 is applied to the top layer (Fig. 2B). Structures defined by mask 13 (Fig. 2A) according to the present invention, and having a different depth in the substrate 4, are

produced by first imaging a pattern onto a photosensitive layer by means of a lithography step.

[0022] In the discussion to follow, each processing step referred to is depicted by a pair of Figures, in which a top Figure illustrates a cross-sectional view through a small opening region, and a bottom Figure (denoted by a ' mark) illustrates a cross-sectional view through a large opening region. Figures 2C and 2D depict how a pattern formed in photosensitive layer 1 (Figs. 2C and 2C') is transferred into layer 2 of the layer stack beneath photosensitive layer 1, so that openings 5 and 7 are formed (Figs. 2D and 2D', respectively). Subsequently, a layer 3 residing in the later stack, located beneath first layer 2, is etched in a manner that results in layer 3 being etched completely down to substrate 4 at locations corresponding to large opening 7, while layer 3 remains only partially etched at locations corresponding to small opening 5 (Figs. 2E and 2E'). In a second etching step, substrate 4 is selectively etched with respect to layer 3, down to the desired depth of the deep structures 9 (Fig. 2F'), as depicted in 2G'. However, during the selective etch, the structure corresponding to the smaller openings remains substantially unaltered, as illustrated in Figure 2G. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, using an additional etching step, layer 3 is opened up at all the locations at which layer 2 has an opening (Figs. 2H and 2H'). Subsequently, in an optional step, a further photosensitive layer 1'', which fills all the openings, is applied (Figs. 2I and 2I'). In an exemplary embodiment, photosensitive layer 1'' is etched back to below a lower edge of layer 3 in the deep structures 9 (Fig. 2J'), and completely in small openings 5 (Fig. 2J). In a final etching step depicted in Figures 2K and 2K', substrate 4 is etched to the depth of the desired shallow

structures 8 (Fig. 2F). Application of photosensitive layer 1'' is required if a layer at which the deep structures end is to be protected, or if the width of the deep structures would be excessively widened by the fourth etching step. If neither of these factors represents a problem, it is also possible to omit the application of the further photosensitive layer 1''.

[0023] Optionally, the structures depicted in Figures 2H and 2H' may be etched such that structures substantially similar to those depicted in Figures 2K and 2K' are formed without the use of layer 1''.

[0024] In an exemplary embodiment, the sequence of layers comprising layers 1, 2, 3, and 4 comprises photosensitive resist, SiO₂, polysilicon, and SiO₂, respectively.

[0025] The process disclosed above is therefore based on a layer which stores information relating to the dimensioning of the structures in a substrate, e.g., layer 3, being applied to substrate 4. The partial exposure of substrate 4 at areas corresponding to large openings, and the subsequent etching of deep structures into substrate 4, while the information about the shallow structures remains stored in layer 3, provides a method to form structures which have a different depth within substrate 4 using just one lithography level, one mask 13, and one etching process.

[0026] The process illustrated above provides a criterion to select a thickness h of the second layer, since, given a predetermined width CD₁ of the shallow structure in the substrate, the thickness h can be calculated as a function of the slope angle α , as $h = (1+x)^{1/2} CD_1 \tan \alpha$, where x can be selected in the range $0 \leq x \leq 1$. It is advantageous that the thickness of the second layer which is suitable for the overall process management can be set by means of the slope angle α .

[0027] A further advantage of the process according to this embodiment results from the fact that a width CD_3 with which the deep structures in the substrate are to be provided at the surface of the second layer can be calculated according to $CD_3 = CD_2 + (1+x)CD_1$, where CD_2 denotes the predetermined width of the deep structure in the substrate. CD_3 is therefore independent of the thickness of the second layer and of the slope angle α and is substantially dependent on the design which predetermines the widths of the structures in the substrate. Thus, a mask for introducing contact holes and interconnects into a substrate can be provided with a suitable structuring without requiring a special etching process. The structure for the contact hole is dimensioned in accordance with the calculated width CD_3 . Interconnect lengths and a curvature of the interconnects can be selected as desired. Details in which the present invention provides the above advantages are discussed below.

[0028] The lateral dimensions of the deep and shallow structures at a depth within the substrate or at the substrate surface, are defined by a design which predetermines an arrangement of structures. In Figure 3A, the width of shallow structure 8, which is predetermined by design, is denoted by CD_1 , and the width of the deep structure 9, which is predetermined by design, is denoted by CD_2 . CD_3 denotes the width according to the present invention of opening 10 in layer 2, which is used for the introduction of the deep structure into substrate 4. The partial opening of layer 3 can be achieved by means of an etching process which produces inclined sidewalls 6 in the first etching step, with the slope angle α of the inclined sidewalls 6 being defined by the etching process parameters selected. The thickness h used for layer 3, is

dependent on CD_1 , on the slope angle α , and on the desired distance h_1 between the etched depth h_2 and the end of the second layer 3, where $h = h_1 + h_2$. As can be seen from Figure 3B, h_2 turns out to be $1/2(CD_1 \cdot \tan\alpha)$. The thickness h_1 can be selected as desired, for example, $h_1 = (x \cdot h_2)$, where $0 \leq x \leq 1$. The thickness h of the second layer 3 then turns out to be $h = (1+x) h_2 = (1+x) 1/2(CD_1 \cdot \tan\alpha)$. As can be seen from Figure 3C, CD_3 can be given as $CD_3 = CD_2 + 2y = CD_2 + 2h/\tan\alpha = CD_2 + (1+x)CD_1$. CD_3 is accordingly independent of the slope angle and of thickness h of layer 3, and is selected in such a way that the second opening in layer 3 toward the substrate 4 has the width CD_2 .

[0029] An example is provided below to further illustrate the above discussion.

Example calculation: the parameters $CD_1 = 110$ nm, $CD_2 = 110$ nm, $x = 10\%$ and $\alpha = 80^\circ$ are preset. Using the above formulae for h and CD_3 , this results in $h = 343$ nm and $CD_3 = 231$ nm. If the slope angle α is selected to be 70° and the other predetermined parameters are maintained, h is calculated to equal 166 nm. CD_3 remains unchanged at 231 nm. CD_3 is therefore independent of the slope angle α and of the thickness h of the second layer. The exemplary embodiment of the present invention described above, therefore provides a method to achieve a ratio of the structure width or specific line width to space (line/space ratio) of 110/220.

[0030] Another embodiment of the present invention for partially opening layer 3, comprises the use of an etching process whose etching speed is dependent on the depth to width ratio, i.e. on the aspect ratio of the structures to be etched, for the first etching step. Structures with a low aspect ratio, i.e. structures which have a large width compared to their depth, are etched more quickly than structures with a high

aspect ratio, i.e. structures which have a low width compared to their depth. Deeper structures in the substrate are therefore dimensioned more widely in layer 3 than shallower structures. On account of the different etching rates in structures with different aspect ratios, partial opening of layer 3 is achieved after a certain time. Layer 3 is then open at the locations at which the structures have a low aspect ratio and remains closed at locations at which the structures have a high aspect ratio.

[0031] In a further exemplary embodiment of the present invention, to enable the process described above to be used for the structuring of contact holes 12 and interconnects 11, illustrated in Figure 4, mask 13 is provided with structures for the introduction of contact holes 12 and interconnects 11 into the substrate 4. The contact holes are dimensioned on the mask in accordance with the above-described calculation of CD_3 , i.e. the width in of the opening 10.

[0032] The length of the interconnects between the contact holes can be selected as desired, and the profile of the interconnects, which may be curved or straight as required, can also be selected freely.

[0033] Mask 13 thus may include structures with suitable dimensions for a process for introduction of contact holes 12 and interconnects 11 into substrate 4 for dual damascene structuring.

[0034] The foregoing disclosure of the preferred embodiments of the present invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed. Many variations and modifications of the embodiments described herein will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art in light of the above disclosure. The scope

of the invention is to be defined only by the claims appended hereto, and by their equivalents.

[0035] Further, in describing representative embodiments of the present invention, the specification may have presented the method and/or process of the present invention as a particular sequence of steps. However, to the extent that the method or process does not rely on the particular order of steps set forth herein, the method or process should not be limited to the particular sequence of steps described. As one of ordinary skill in the art would appreciate, other sequences of steps may be possible. Therefore, the particular order of the steps set forth in the specification should not be construed as limitations on the claims. In addition, the claims directed to the method and/or process of the present invention should not be limited to the performance of their steps in the order written, and one skilled in the art can readily appreciate that the sequences may be varied and still remain within the spirit and scope of the present invention.